

Chapter Eight

CREATIVITY I

*One can say of the artist that he does not practice his calling. He is his calling. . .
His calling is not a means of livelihood, but life itself.*

Otto Rank, *Art and Artist*

The makers and lovers of beauty save us.

Gregory Corso



O **Light In Our Eyes**

It is rare to find a friend who quietly walks among these same mountains and pines and luminous morning mist-clouds. I cherish and appreciate them whenever they appear. Meanwhile, there is no need to spend time yearning for others. There are many already present.

It does not matter to me when the book was written, the music composed, the painting completed. It may have been centuries ago. The brothers and sisters who created them are living and breathing and singing to me right here, right now, some of the best friends I have ever known.

With a smile I welcome them, hug them warmly, invite them for tea. We sit on the cabin porch, enjoying each other's company while the stream murmurs on. Our conversations span millennia. There is always light in our eyes.

O **Lost, and Found**

Creativity is self-discovery. You arrive at the music or the painting or the word through the act itself.

First, you disappear, become empty of identity, knowledge and all preconceived images, ideas and directives. You drop memory, you drop the past, you embrace the now.

In giving birth conceptually and technically to that which is new, you discover your essential nature, which is not personal at all. It is transpersonal, universal, and radiant with compassion, intelligence, wisdom and love.

Then you play, paint or write spontaneously, following inspiration like a child, simultaneously utilizing or devising techniques that serve and expedite emerging sonic, visual or verbal imagery.

Choices follow or accompany inspiration. Sometimes there is conflict, sometimes flow, but in this second or accompanying stage of creativity, selectivity plays an equally important role — criticism, questioning, comparison, evaluation, rejection, acceptance.

All of these functions can be performed with serenity and compassion for self and the work. In this domain, passion and detachment fuse into a unified whole. Self-acceptance, creativity and integration become synonymous.

O Creativity Transforms Chaos Into Love

If we are silent in our mind, we discover we have unlimited access to creative energies that infuse not only ourselves, but the whole of existence.

In silence, inwardly unified and undivided, undistracted by external noises or internal chatter, we transcend acquired self-images, dissolve conditioning, and connect with our own authenticity, our own radiant uniqueness.

We die to the past, to yesterday, history, tradition and collective socialization. We awaken to the here, the now, the new. In deep relaxation, with a still mind, creativity blossoms like a rose.

In all of its multitudes of forms, we allow it to release its energy in the intense, selfless sharing of love, compassion and wisdom. Life is light. Life is joy. Life is celebration. These are creative energies.

Creativity transforms even chaos, anger and sorrow into love. Creative energies are constructive, not destructive. They affirm life, love, laughter. They already exist within us as universal core-energies. We need only to venture into our own interiority to discover, embrace, realize and celebrate them.

We do not have to *become* anything. In psychological depths and spiritual heights beyond our egoic pseudo-self, we are already that which we would become. Here, in the heart of the rose, shines the light.

As you know, I am a great believer in a certain dynamic: creativity is an avenue into mental health. When you transmute any vision, perception or feeling into objective beauty, you come to understand yourself more deeply. Every creative effort opens new doors into your own psyche. It not only releases emotions cathartically. It reveals new shades and dimensions of your inner self. Creative action becomes a process of self-knowing. The emotional content in itself doesn't matter — anger, joy, sorrow, sexuality, sadness, desire, whatever. It's the process of self-exploration through creativity that is important.

Even as I write this letter to you, I come to know myself a little better. Each insight, each thought, each feeling that I shape into words opens another door into who and what I am. This letter was not already written in my head when I sat down. It was not pre-existent, ready to be simply typed out. No, each word leads to the next; each sentence leads to the next; each paragraph becomes a new brick in the structure; each moment of reflection, formulation, and release reveals me and my inner self, not only to you, but to me as well. I become a different person as I write to you, a new person, a deeper, wiser, more insightful person, than I was before I sat down to share these thoughts. See what I mean?

That is why I urge throwing yourself into your artistic work. It is not merely just something to do. Nor is it repetition that I'm talking about (Oh, I did this activity before, but maybe it would be nice to get back to it). I'm talking about *intense involvement*. Putting *energy* into it. Discovering the new in yourself and the work. Contacting your deepest feelings about yourself, about J, about D, about your lot in life, about your anxieties, fantasies, dreams — and giving them fresh, new, symbolic objective form as art.

You know, even as I do, that you have considerable talent, and you have a tremendous amount of energy, imagination, and intelligence. When you resolve to

utilize these capabilities to mine the gold within your heart and soul, and then plunge in with full-out energy, you will find yourself soaring up and above and beyond the doubts and discomforts of daily life. You will, in fact, re-create yourself with every stroke of the brush, every written word, and every shaping of the clay, papier-mache, or wood.

SL Creativity Re-Creates the Brain

I just sent you an article from the *New York Times* about the malleability of the human brain. ("The Brain: Malleable, Capable, Vulnerable," by Abigail Zuger, May 29, 2007.) I was especially interested in the parts that dealt with the fact that we can change our brains and our outlooks by means of applied thought processes (the paragraph dealing with notes on the piano, and the paragraph following it were especially interesting to me.)

You said in your last letter, "I only wish I believed that creativity was the answer to the inner crises. Inspiration is fighting me with a very sharp sword, knowing I am armed only with a small, blunt vegetable paring knife. . . . I will have to be devious and catch it unawares, won't I?"

I think the notion that we may be able to make the virtual real and that we can quantify and objectively create new thought processes in the brain through the power of thought itself is amazing. Thought and creativity physically affect the actual wiring of the brain-mind complex. To me, that is something to remember.

In other words, we are armed with more than a blunt vegetable paring knife — and my remarks about the power of creativity to alter perception through "hard cerebral work" is valid not only as an opinion or personal observation but as a fact that is

only now emerging in the material/scientific domain. It's an encouraging fact, isn't it? All of us have more in our arsenal than a paring knife.

I don't think painting a picture or playing the piano or whatever will solve everything in our life. But I do know that if we don't wait for inspiration, but simply jump into the process with full conviction and energy, then inspiration starts flowing, perhaps slowly at first, and then it gains momentum. But first one must jump in — can't swim in air standing by the side of the pool!

By starting and continuing, we enter that process of altering perception about ourselves and the work. Taken far enough, these new perceptions carry over into daily life. Seems to me that article about the brain validates what I'm saying in very important ways. Do you agree?

JK New Beginnings: Take the First Step

It is my great hope that everything is moving along smoothly for you. Sometimes the valley gives us enormous initiative to once again revitalize ourselves and aspire to the heights. In and of itself, creativity generates love and strength, even as love and strength generate creativity. From either direction, new beginnings are possible, and new life.

The hardest part, quite often, is simply sitting down and taking the first step on the creative journey, showing up and liberating the heartflow. But once the beginning is allowed, all else follows, as if of its own accord. Only trust and receptivity are needed in order to sit down and begin again. Indeed, you are holy and you are strong. Empty yourself of self, and the Selfless Self will flow into you like waterfalls of living light and love.

I always liked Goethe's lines from *Faust* —

*Are you in earnest? Seize this very minute -
Boldness has genius, power and magic in it.
Only engage, and then the mind grows heated.
Begin it, and then the work will be completed!*

My heart sings with you, J.
Keep on keepin' on!

JB In the Heart of the Rose

How thoughtful of you to enquire about the new booklet I am working on.

It's an assemblage of quotes on creativity, about 50 pages total, entitled *The Heart of the Rose*.

I meet with small group of friends once a month or so, a painter, a couple of writers, a musician, and one or two others, and we yak about different aspects of creativity, not focusing on technical matters or external objects (paintings, etc.), but upon inner conditions, outlooks, mental/emotional barriers/openings, psycho-spiritual freedom and how to access it, discovering the self, transcending the self, moving into meditative no-mind (as some of the Zen folks call it), creativity as a process of self-realization, and dozens of related matters.

For example, saxophonist John Coltrane tapped into one of our greatest fears when he said —

It seems history shows that the innovator is more often than not met with some degree of condemnation; usually according to the degree of departure from the prevailing modes of expression. Change is always so hard to accept.

We also see that these innovators always seek to revitalize, extend, and reconstruct the status quo in their given field, whatever is needed. Quite often they are the rejects, outcasts, sub-citizens of the very societies to which they bring so much sustenance. Often they are people who endure great personal tragedy in their lives.

Whatever the case, whether accepted or rejected, rich or poor, they are forever guided by that great and eternal constant — the creative urge. Let us cherish it. . .

And *there* is where the fear is —

If I leave the realm of the known and open myself to the new, the unknown, and that which supercedes conventions, will I be embraced, or crucified by those who listen to my music or look at my painting or read my words? Should I play it safe?

What is creative courage? What might it involve? Am I capable or worthy enough to sacrifice community for individuality? Is individuality antithetical to communication and the communion of shared realities? How can I dissolve and transcend tradition, convention and my own psycho-social conditioning? Even if I can, do I dare?

Never mind criticism — what about money and survival? Do I have a choice?

Who am I? What is the truth of who I am? Do I find that out (if so, how?) and *then* create? Or is creativity itself a process of self-discovery?

If I follow my authenticity, move into the new, and make the Herculean effort of creating a new language, am I being self-centered and unbearably self-indulgent — or am I being selfless and profoundly loving and compassionate in service to my art and to humanity, perhaps even heroically so? Does the creative process itself transform idiosyncratic individuality into universality?

That is only one area, of course, and the above are only a few questions that can be raised in that area. Or, more accurately, every area leads to and touches on every other area; it's all one thing, with a multitude of interrelated aspects and dimensions. Clearly, there is a lot involved with this matter of creativity not only in art, but in daily life, in one's daily work, relationships, environment, etc.

So I thought I would sit down and pull out a few quotes from a variety of writers past and present, and touch upon as many dimensions as I can in a relatively brief space. (Writers include: Joseph Campbell, Otto Rank, Walt Whitman, Hermann Hesse, Osho, Hazrat Inayat Khan, Ken Wilber, Wassily Kandinsky, J. Krishnamurti, Ranier Maria Rilke, Abraham Maslow, Coltrane, myself and others.)

I'll print out enough copies for the group — maybe 8 or 10 — and pass them out, and have it available for future printouts should anybody else be interested.

SL Surrounded By Scorpions

. . . . I've been waging a war against people like your in-laws for most of my life. First, against my conventional, materialistic parents. Then, against those elements of the larger society and individuals in it who despise artistic creativity, fear

individuality, and do everything they can to undermine the strength, moral rectitude, and confidence of those (such as yourself) who either by fate or choice live outside the restrictions and comforts of middleclass mediocrity.

You are not alone.

As you have indicated on more than one occasion, your husband's family is toxic. Not only are they insensitive in the extreme, but they are a smug, self-righteous bunch, superficial and unconscious, totally brainwashed by spirit-deadening middleclass perspectives on everything from food to work to child rearing. They are dead souls. They don't even realize how poisonous their stupid remarks are, how hurtful their callous jokes, how subversive their arrogant values. Your husband's father killed every one of them inside, and you are suffering the consequences of that, first through them, then through your husband, who lost his tortured soul along the way. My heart goes out to him, too. At least your husband has enough sense and sensitivity remaining to be with you and live the quiet, gentle life you live together.

You are absolutely right. You got waylaid at the funeral. You came home a diminished person. With every crass question and remark, they undercut your values and whacked your confidence. You are not to blame. They blind-sided you with every comment, especially those ignorant, asinine, block-headed remarks about your being a "lady of leisure" because you are an artist — in other words, a lazy, shiftless person who doesn't have a "real" job worthy of respect.

These people and their ilk have been degrading, torturing, ridiculing, despising, and both consciously and unconsciously hating artists since the first cave man skipped work and painted bison on the cave walls. In the kingdom of the blind, the one-eyed person is neither king nor queen. The one-eyed person is crucified, poisoned, hanged, or stoned to death. Y'gotta watch out for these bastards.

The worst part about their sometimes brutally insensitive toxicity is that to an unwary person, or to an innocent childlike soul who looks toward them for appreciation, respect, or any sort of humane validation, that childlike person inevitably comes away stricken with corrosive self-doubt. Confidence is shaken or shattered. Self-respect is often polluted by malicious judgmental jokes or apparently demeaning questions — about height, children, flying, driving, whatever. Buttons are pushed intentionally or unintentionally.

And when the only person (such as your husband) who understands a childlike person like this either abandons or ignores him or her, well, hello — fear, the cry for help, the desperate sense of vulnerability, alienation, the horror of finding one's self alone, unaided, surrounded by scorpions. Old terrors from childhood re-surface. Ancient dark winds howl once again through the tortured psyche.

Ignorant, insensitive, materialistic, anti-creative herd-minds such as your in-laws have been harassing, subverting, poisoning, and murdering artists (and similarly sensitive folks) forever, dear S. They are a mean-spirited bunch, and very often are not the slightest bit conscious of what they are saying or doing. You're right. They *did* do a hatchet job on you. . . . Keep your distance in the future, eh?

SL **Nimble Receptivity**

At the moment I'm reading a wonderful book by Rollo May, entitled *The Courage to Create*. He examines various elements of courage that creativity involves, and explores the creative process with considerable insight and understanding. It's a short book, published some time ago (1973), easy to read. This morning I ran across a wonderful passage, which confirmed my own experiences with writing and playing music, perhaps your experiences too —

Your spontaneity and emotional expressiveness dazzles me. I would imagine that your moonlight dance and the attendant images in your body and mind had to have felt immensely liberating. I would also imagine that you can use the emotional liberation as a springboard to further self-exploration and release it in dance, in art, in virtually every area of your life. It is this kind of passionate, spontaneous, creative expression of energy that vitalizes whichever form it occupies.

You can bring it to your husband. You can bring it to the canvas. You can bring it to every touch you offer and every smile you extend. It's the energy of sunlight, moonlight, joy, beneficence, compassion, and whoopee-do. I bet you have already realized this and are infusing it into each great and small gesture of daily life.